

Part of leading a more healthy lifestyle means eating better. To assist in these efforts to move towards healthier living and eating, every March, the American Dietetic Association (ADA) focuses on the basics of healthy eating as part of National Nutrition Month.

Initiated in 1973 as a week-long event, National Nutrition Week became a month-long activity in 1980 in response to growing public interest. Its main purpose is to focus attention on the importance of making responsible food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. This year's motto, "Eat Right with Color," has been chosen to remind Americans to include a colorful variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy in their meals every day in order to make sure that they are getting all of the nutrients they need.

Although more Americans are becoming aware of the importance of a healthy diet, we still have work to do to become a healthy society. According to the World Health Organization, around 68 percent of U.S. adults in 2008 were overweight, with 33 percent of them considered obese, and the numbers are still rising. Often, the unhealthy habits that lead to these conditions begin at an early age.

In Florida, one out of every four individuals over the age of 20 is physically inactive in their leisure time and around 25 percent of Floridian adults suffer from obesity. Additionally, one out of four adults were diagnosed with diabetes in 2008. Those who suffer from being overweight or who are obese also face a higher risk of hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Still, weight is not the only indicator of good or bad nutrition. Any person - whether he or she is of healthy weight, overweight or obese - can be malnourished. Besides the massive challenges that we face in terms of obesity, the U.S. is also confronted with hunger. The situation in the Sunshine State is particularly precarious: Florida ranks thirteenth in the nation with an average food hardship rate of 22 percent. This means nearly one out of four Floridians does not have enough money to buy food for themselves or family. These numbers are alarming.

Although we recognize nutrition in March, we must also be aware of the nutrition problems that the U.S. faces and our personal responsibility to take control of our own health. As a Member of Congress, I will continue to strongly support initiatives that address this issue and continue working to reduce hunger and improve peoples' access to affordable and healthy food as we move towards becoming a healthier nation.

